The game was finally over. I stood there while the atom bombs dropped, showering myself in the fallout of defeat. The rubble of shattered hopes and fragmented dreams scattered the landscape around me. If I closed my eyes, I would be able to see myself still coming up with another plan that would blow up in my face and bring me and Cassie further to disaster. The police officer is staring me down, trying to probe my mind and uncover whatever diabolical secret or monstrous plan I have. What is my next move? I can the wonder in his eyes.

The answer is quite simply that I don't have another move. This is checkmate. There isn't any way out of this. If I got lucky again through improvisation and luck it would all be for naught. Cassie had been betrayed, by me, her supposed guardian angel. The one bastard that even tried to help her managed to break her heart and string webs of deceit. I debate twitching forward, giving the officer credence to shoot me down. Instead I resort to locking eyes with him. He's barely blinking; I don't blink at all. Our breaths are both heavy and evenly matched in that regard, mine from exhaustion, and his from fear.

Something falls down behind me and makes a clang. The officer quickly turns to face it. His eyes widen and return to their former post. I haven't moved. I'm not going to. I'm waiting for his next order. But then he stares at it for a second or two, as if waiting for an imaginary accomplice, a playmate of mine in this demonic game. It seems so easy. Just get up. A man filled with fear acts rash and stupid. I've been learning this lesson again and again. I twitch, debating. No. What more can I really do? Be a fugitive? Force Cassie to come with me? Into what? I'm on my shoulders when the barn door goes flying open. Both my attention and the attention of the officer are drawn to the door. It's Cassie, of her own accord. Our eyes lock. She's still hidden behind a mist of distrust and betrayal. I'd reach out to her, but I feel the presence of the gun firmly aimed at me. One move, even incidental, and it's over... even more so then it is now. I wonder why I'm deluding myself, trying to find kernels of hope in this deadly damned situation. Regardless, all three of us stood frozen in the moment for what seems like a good long time. It's Cassie who breaks the silence.

"A-are you gonna hurt him?" she asked. The concern broke through her voice.

"That depends," the officer replied. "Did he hurt you?"

The moment of truth. Could Cassie forgive me with my life on the line? If she didn't want me in her life, I'd be gone. I plucked myself out of my mind and looked at hers. I see her lip twitch and the truth became obvious to me: Cassie didn't want to lie. I had hurt her. I knew it. Cassie knew it, and the police officer knew it. One word could end me, and Cassie knew it. She is afraid of having that power.

"Sweetie, you can tell me. Did he promise you anything...? Games, candy, a puppy?"

I cringed.

"He said..." Cassie snivels

Tears begin to form in Cassie's eyes. The tension in the room is hard to see through. One verbal misstep from Cassie, even the shard ice truth, could send pieces of shrapnel throughout the barn. I'm fairly sure that I stopped breathing awhile ago because my chest feels cold and heavy. This must be what death feels like.

"He said that he would make all of the bad things go away," she says.

Cassie breaks down crying. The police officer wanders into my sight, struggling to comfort her. Little does he know that the pain is buried on the inside, caused by years and years of ruthless scarring. I'd make a remark but I know I'm still not in the position to do so. The setting sun shines a glare on the silver pistol.

"What do you mean by the 'bad things'?"

Cassie is to lost in her tears to say anything; too lost in her fears. I feel the ghost of suspicion lift off of my back. It is a refreshing sensation to say the least. The blood rushes back into a pale face. The chest feels comfortable enough to breathe.

"Mr. Wright..." Cassie gasps through her tears. I look alert. "Mr. Wright... I said I'd rather die than go back there. I'm not going back! You can't make me go back!"

"What the hell is she talking about?" the officer asks me through Cassie's hysterics.

Suddenly it's clear to me how selfish I've been. This isn't about my failures. I can now see what it's truly about. An apparent truth finally runs face first into my soul. This life that I lead, this adventures I've been leading, it isn't about me. I don't know why I deluded myself into thinking that that was the case. My throat burns as I begin to speak.

"Cassie has had a hard life," I manage to say. "With someone like her only the most evil kind of person would do anything to intentionally hurt her."

"But how can I believe you!?" Cassie says, looking up at me through tearful eyes. "You've lied so much, I-I don't know what to believe anymore!"

The police officer turns to me. He's now caught in the mire of confusion. I can only hope to help him out of it, as well as Cassie.

"Cassie, every lie I told was to help get you to safety."

"Why!?" Cassie says, and then she turns into her self. "...I don't deserve it."

"Cassie, you are a wonderful person. Don't ever doubt that."

"How do I know that that's not another lie!?"

"You don't," I say.

I try not to turn away in pure shame, but I connect with the police officer. He doesn't know what to think. Then I realize it's not his job to know what to think. I kidnapped Cassie and that's all he had to care about. Perhaps this isn't the last stop on the crazy train. Always the quick thinker, always a new idea on the fly, and this time is no exception. Cassie is still behind so many barriers put up by the world around her. I take a deep breath.

"Officer...?" I offer.

"Officer Sadowski," he replies.

"Officer Sadowski. When you arrest me, you said you'll take Cassie back to her home with her parents."

Cassie turns white. I cannot believe what I'm doing here. For the first time I truly feel diabolical. I'm manipulating someone's fears. It's a sick and twisted ploy, and one that forces me to hold back all kinds of tears. Cassie backs up, looking horrified at the police officer. Just the thought alone has put her on edge. When she can manage to choke up something to say, there are very few words beyond "no." Eventually Cassie falls to her knees.

"D-don't make me go back!" she cries.

"What the fuck happened to her," Officer Sadowski says, forgetting himself.

He falls into the same trap that I had found myself in such a long time ago. He looked into the sad eyes of that little girl, beaten and world-weary by reality's cold hard vice. He wanted to approach, but he knew that that would drive her away. He looks to me, almost accusatory. He wants to believe that I'm to blame, but can't crack through the grueling emotions that had been placed up. No one knew how to proceed until someone grabbed Cassie. It was the other police officer; the one that I didn't end up shooting.

"You found her!" he says excitedly. "I guess the rat finally told you. She looks terrible. Her clothes are all torn up."

Cassie looks up at him, unable to speak. I can practically see the nightmares dancing and playing around her. I want to say that that was all another lie of mine, that these police officers will take her to a nice and happy place. But that's the funny thing about hope. It feels good while you have it and can give warmth and light, but when that warmth is gone and that light is extinguished you feel colder and more jaded than you would have had that hope never been there at all. I say nothing.

"I see you didn't shoot him. Looks like we'll have to let the state do it for us." "Hammerston, we've got to talk. There's something you should know," Sadowski begins, but the other office doesn't listen.

Within a few minutes I'm shackled in handcuffs and walking away from the barn. As I'm carried away by this Hammerston, the only thing I hear are Cassie's screams of fear. As I walk in lockstep with him, I see Cassie struggling to pull away from Officer Sadowski. I see dark shadows on Sadowski's face as he walks forward in a robotic fashion. I soon find myself in the back of a police cruiser, staring out the window.

I see Cassie sitting in the passenger's side seat in Sadowski's cruiser. She looks at me in terrified fear. She looks to me for hope, for answers, salvation. Through my tear-filled eyes I don't think that I have any more to give. There is only one thing I can think of doing. I capture the magic of the setting sun in a smile, containing the summer's warmth. Cassie sees it, and it seems to settle her tears as Sadowski's cruiser pulls away. It's only when she's out of sight do I burst into the full force of my tears with the realization that I may never see Cassie again.